

"VANOR"

Between Lancaster Pike and Radnor PRR Station,  
near King of Prussia Road  
Radnor Township  
Delaware County  
Pennsylvania

HAES No. PA-193

HAES

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
120 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## "VANOR"

Street Address: Between Lancaster Pike and Radnor PRR Station,  
Radnor Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: Benjamin Chew, 1127 Brynlawn Road, Villanova, Pa.

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Abandoned and expected to be demolished

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This eighteenth century farmhouse was enlarged  
and converted into a country house in the grand  
scale.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: John Morgan prior to 1744; his son, Samuel Morgan; his daughter, Sarah Morgan (d. 1814), who married Joseph Johnson (d. 1785); their son, Joseph Johnson; his daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth Jones Johnson and husband David Sands Brown; their daughter and son-in-law, Mary Johnson Brown and husband Samuel Chew; their son, Benjamin Chew (1878-1938); his children including Benjamin Chew (b. 1914) -- eight generations in all who lived here.
2. Date of erection: 1715 is date stated by Anne Chew Barringer, sister of Benjamin Chew, present owner, to be traditional date of erection of the oldest part of the house.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: No information
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No information
5. Notes on alterations and additions: In the mid-nineteenth century the large, square east section was built, probably by David Sands Brown, a wealthy calico manufacturer; it was of three stories, but the third had small, half sized windows. There were three small porches, one at the south, east and north ends, trimmed with wooden gingerbread. At this time the remaining section of the original house to the west had its original, heavy corniced roof line (no dormers), was two bays wide, with a third bay in an added wing (room above, open porch below). At a later date, possibly 1890's, this section was finished off into one unit and dormers erected on south and north sides.

A porch was introduced on the north side at the east end and a semi-circular porch on the south side at the east end, probably between the 1890's and 1919. In 1919 the roof was raised in the east section, making a full ceiling on the third floor and a balustrade was added running around all four sides above the cornice in the east section.

6. Important old views and references: Two photographs of c. 1800 and two photographs of c. 1925, owned by Benjamin Chew, have been rephotographed and are included with this report.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Chain of Title of "Vainor" (so spelled) from John Morgan, died 1744, to Joseph Johnson of Philadelphia, ship chandler, is given in deed from Johnson to his son-in-law, David Sands Brown, merchant of Philadelphia, who got house and 160 acres by indenture of November 28, 1833. (This deed recorded in Delaware County Deed Book S, p. 694, and subsequent transactions and brief of title are held by Land Title & Trust Co. #983186).

The name Vanor came from Vaenor, Radnorshire, Wales, the original home of John Morgan, who is said to have gotten his land from William Penn.

David Sands Brown, who married Elizabeth Jones Johnson, was a well-to-do cloth manufacturer (mills in Gloucester County, N. J.) and bank director and made the family fortune, remodelled Vanor, etc. Much information about his son-in-law, Samuel Chew, and grandson, Benjamin Chew, can be found in genealogical works on the Chew family. The latter is frequently mentioned in the fox-hunting books of J. Stanley Reeve, having long been Master of Fox Hounds of the Radnor Hunt. Mrs. Samuel Chew's maiden sister, Miss Martha Morris Brown, long lived at Vanor in the summers with the Chew family (it was always a summer residence until the twentieth century) and for her are named "Martha Brown's Woods," on the south side of Lancaster Pike.

An account of the various tenant farms, the active Guernsey dairy farm, orchard, crops, etc. of the agricultural operation at Vanor were described in some detail by Anne Chew Barringer in letter, dated January 11, 1957, now in possession of F. J. Dallett.

- C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None known, unless the papers of Miss Elizabeth Chew at "Cliveden," Germantown, will reveal information.

Prepared by F. J. Dallett Date June 1958  
For Radnor Historical Society

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

## A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Farmhouse of eighteenth century enlarged in the nineteenth century to large country house and again in twentieth century to imposing size and proportions so that all eighteenth century features were covered up or lost but a handsome house resulted.

The original house appears to have been the present two-and-a-half story west section, but this is constructed of brick and brick was not used in the neighborhood until about 1800, so even this section cannot be said with certainty to have been the nucleus of the 1715 structure.

2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in fair condition, but is rapidly deteriorating because it has been abandoned. The house is expected to be demolished.

## B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Not recorded
2. Foundations: Stone
3. Wall construction: Brick covered with pebble dash and finished in a tan color; pebble dash is wearing off exposing bricks in various places.
4. Porches: Existing porches appear to be replacements /see photographs-JPN/. No information on original construction
5. Chimneys: Six, of brick. (Two in west section, four in east section)
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Wood panelled doors mostly made on the estate in the late nineteenth century.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Some nineteenth century wood panelled shutters made on the site; some late nineteenth or early twentieth century louvered shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Hip roof in large east section; gable roof in west section. Wood shingles. Rotting away and in bad condition.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Heavy cornice with dentils. Balustrade enclosed the roof above the cornice after 1919 but was demolished in very recent years.
- c. Dormers: Two on north side and two on south side, both in west section. One half-moon dormer on south side in east section.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans:  
Basement contains kitchen, laundry, and servants' dining room.  
First Floor: Center hall in east section; eight main rooms throughout (not including lavatory and pantry)  
Second Floor: Four bedrooms and two baths, east side, and four bedrooms and two baths, west side.  
Third Floor: Four bedrooms and one bath, east side; five bedrooms and one bath, west side.
2. Stairways: Three stairways, one from center hall in east section, one in center of west section, and one at extreme west end.
3. Flooring: Nineteenth century floor
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered walls, painted and/or papered, except in front hall and stairs, east section, which have remains of wainscoting (much of it recently ripped out and stolen). The ceilings in all rooms on first floor in east end have plaster floral medallions in the center, from which gas chandeliers once hung (mid-nineteenth century installations).
5. Doorways and doors: Quartered oak doors in almost every room, nearly all made on the place. Egyptian type door framing in rooms in east section, which date that detail of construction fairly well as mid-nineteenth century.
6. Trim: Walnut wall bookcases in library made on place.
7. Hardware: Brass, late nineteenth century.
8. Lighting: Electricity (not connected)
9. Heating: Three methods: hot air, steam, and hot water. Seven fireplaces on first floor; six fireplaces on second floor; four fireplaces on third floor. Mantels are all late nineteenth or early twentieth century on first floor, east section; most of others in both sections are mid-nineteenth century, several lined in cast iron.

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## D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Set in grove of trees near new road, grounds heavily overgrown and neglected. Main highway and Radnor Pennsylvania Railroad Station nearby. The front of the building faces south.
2. Enclosures: No information
3. Outbuildings: Stone spring house. All outbuildings, including stables, barn, farmers' cottages, etc., in immediate proximity of Vanor, have been demolished for the Wyeth Laboratories and TV Guide, recently erected on the property.
4. Walks, driveways etc.: All overgrown and abandoned
5. Landscaping, gardens etc.: Site once was magnificently landscaped with garden and lawn.

Prepared by

F. J. DelleDate June 1958

For Radnor Historical Society